

What Is God Thinking?

I have been pondering the message of this book for a long time—at least eight years. Its essence has come quietly, a bit now and a piece then, in reflective moments. But it has also arisen out of times of busyness and confusion. One such day was back in October 1992.

I left my office shortly after five o'clock that Thursday burdened with the latest evidences of a culture in moral decline. I had edited several articles for publication that spelled out the ongoing slippage. A presidential election loomed less than three weeks away, and at that point, conservative Christians were reluctantly starting to admit to each other, although not in public, that George Bush might go down in defeat for a second term in the White House.

If that happened, I realized, it would mark the first time in seven elections that the American evangelical community had not gotten what it wanted. All the way back to the chaotic campaign of 1968, Christians of a conservative bent had received their wishes: Richard Nixon over Hubert Humphrey, then Nixon again over George McGovern. In 1976 they were of mixed opinion, their Republican loyalties to Gerald Ford moderated somewhat by the "born-again" testimony of Jimmy Carter. Either man seemed acceptable. But by 1980 and 1984, the bumper stickers in most church parking lots strongly leaned toward Ronald Reagan. In 1988, George Bush was clearly the choice over Michael Dukakis. Six in a row.... But now the pro-choice Democrat from Arkansas was ahead in the polls. What would become of the cause of righteousness if Bill Clinton actually won the presidency?

Other battles pressed upon my mind as I pulled onto the freeway heading north: court decisions that week that made little sense, divorce statistics ballooning, government policies granting license to immoral behavior, Hollywood pumping out one visual cesspool after another.... What a wretched time to have to live!

In the weekly rhythm of our household, Thursday night meant choir rehearsal at church. My wife was the pianist; I was a member of the bass section. We ate a hurried meal and soon headed back south on the freeway, entering the building none too early for the seven o'clock practice.

Late October in our church has for a number of years been earmarked for a special event called "missions conference," a two-Sunday emphasis on world evangelism. Flags of the nations are strung high across the sanctuary expanse, colorful posters are hung on the narthex walls, and members are asked to make "faith promises" to fund missions efforts in the coming months. It's a festive time, with video reports, theme-related music, and guest speakers from far corners of the world.

I remember two songs we practiced that Thursday night. Both were up-tempo, even energetic, supported not only by piano and synthesizer but also by a brass section, bass guitar, and drums. My fellow singers began to unleash the rhythm of ...

Look what God is doing

All across the land!

See His Spirit moving,

Feel His mighty hand,

Breaking chains of darkness,

Setting the captive free.

Look what God is doing

To those who do believe.

Glory, hallelujah!

Look what God is doing!

Ten minutes later the rehearsal had moved along to this chorus:

There's going to be a revival in the land.

There's going to be a revival in the land.

From the north, from the south,

From the east, from the west,

There's going to be a revival in the land.

Insight can indeed break through during the routine of a choir rehearsal. (I once read about a Minnesota engineer who, while fumbling to find the right pages in the music books that filled his lap, suddenly thought of a new use for the failed adhesive he had been trying to develop that day at the 3M Corporation—and thus was born our society's now ubiquitous self-sticking notes.) I could not help noticing the sharp contrast between the pessimism of my day at work and the buoyant optimism of the missions music. If I had stopped to sing anything during the day, it would have been "*There's going to be a disaster in the land*"—specifically in about three weeks, at the polls. Now here I was in the choir loft, my shoulders gently bobbing to the expectation of revival and God's blessing.

Was I kidding myself? Was all this just pep-rally music, designed merely to enthuse the congregation so they would open their checkbooks?

No, I had to admit, there were solid missions reports to back up the lyrics. God *was* doing amazing things in certain parts of the world. Scripture portions were being handed out by the millions in formerly Communist schools from Warsaw to Vladivostok. Latin Americans were packing soccer stadiums to hear the gospel preached. Drug users in North American cities were turning away from their addictions through the power of Christ. Orphans in Southeast Asia were being fed, cared for, educated, and loved in Jesus' name. *Look what God is doing....*

As I left the church that evening, I was thoroughly confused. I didn't know what to feel. I was a walking case of what psychologists call *cognitive dissonance*, that state of mind when two parts of one's consciousness are in direct contradiction. "On the one hand..., but on the other hand...." and you can't make the pieces mesh. All I knew was that I liked the choir outlook better than the office outlook. But was it credible? Was there indeed any basis for encouragement and hope in the run-up to Election Day?

In the grand scheme of things, of course, it didn't matter all that much what I did with my personal dilemma. More important for me—and for everyone else—was to grasp God's view of current reality. As he looked down from the vastness of heaven at this third planet from the sun, what was he seeing? What was he thinking? What was he saying to the angels about the goings-on here? What would he applaud, and what would he reproach? What did he wish his people to do—and not do?